



# art project in landscape- spring 2022

## FINLAND

### ***Background***

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What is the Finnish identity – how do we define it through art, or can we even do so? How is art connected to nature changes in different times and seasons? Why and how nature is so important to Finnish people?

Finnish identity has a strong relationship to the nature<sup>1</sup>. It defines our mentality. We appreciate quietness, personal space, pure nature, seasons and the healing impact of the forest. These might be clichés but that's the question – where the clichés come if they're not true?<sup>2</sup>

In the beginning of this Erasmus project planning the connection to nature was clear. Finnish part of the project would be art in the landscape.

The hypothesis in the project was that art activity will strengthen teacher's skills and networking globally and our student's cross-cultural capacity by bringing "Europe to Siilinjärvi", not to mention promote art as way of communication. Broaden the mind, breaking the invisible boundaries that might restrict life, creativity and the mutual relationships – these were the key goals that the art project might reach. This project was assumed also to strengthen the well-being of teachers and

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<sup>1</sup> [Suomalaisten luontosuhde -tutkimusraportti \(sitra.fi\)](#)

[Survey: Almost 90 per cent of Finnish people consider nature important to themselves – there is a wide range of relationships with nature, no single right one - Sitra](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Yle Luonnon kysely: Suomalainen on yllättävän vahvasti luontoihminen – sienestys, kalastus ja kansallispuistot eivät silti kiinnosta useimpia | Luonto | yle.fi](#)

students that are still working and maybe give them new perspectives to their daily work, no matter in which branch they are working.

This is how project was described in the project plan in it's early stage:

“(Mari) I would like to do the project in the nature with other participants from Europe plus my students: we create a lesson concept in nature where is combined the traditional art to “the sense based, out-of-the classroom lesson”. The work that would be done in the nature is such that it gives also pleasure for the people that pass the art piece. We have talked here a lot how we could for example reach those people that don't go to the exhibitions, but who could get pleasure just walking by. These works could be such that they're independent pieces of art but also art pieces together.”



## Activity

### 1. Space and the Third Space



The place was an open-air space beside the lake, in a small forest. In summertime it's a backyard of a summer theatre. Part of the activity was held in that summer theatre area (choir singing, warm up, concert in the evening) and painting was done beside the beach which is close to the summer theatre but independent forest area.

It's a common nature area even though it's also a backyard of the summer theatre. People go there for a walk, in summertime sometimes

fishing, and in wintertime to slide and skiing. The beach (in the picture seen behind) close to the nature/ theatre area there is a common beach. Beside the beach there is a public sauna plus in wintertime an open water for ice swimming. The theatre area is used many times also for other occasions like concerts and sometimes the same nature area is “seized” with young people in summertime to hang beside an un-official fireplace.

So, in this perspective, it's a social space. And it is definitely a Third Space.

The space is neutral, if the space can ever be neutral.

The forest is always a certain type of forest -like meant for activity e.g. hiking or picking up berries or hunting or economics (forestry). Is the forest easy to be accessed (close to the people or do you have e.g drive long way)? Is the forest open or grown tight (e.g. there are three

different basic types of Finnish forest)? Or is it owned by someone (possibility to be there but is it appropriate – like too close to the housing etc)?

Thinking of the forest in general from this point of view, none of the spaces are completely neutral.

But in a way that this space, a small forest beside lake, could be reached with anyone, easy to access many ways, open-air space, close to village and not owned by anyone – in this perspective, it's neutral.

The space is not super huge but it's also hard to define exactly cause the area doesn't have any boundaries. There is no specific start or end. The lake shore makes a natural border that you could cross (by all means) but it changes the activity immediately when you end up to the water. Also, the sandy beach is a kind of boundary cause then the forest changes to the beach. The activity changes the same way then as when you move to the water.

Theatre scene and stand also "lines up" the area – makes the change in activity.

In this specific activity the area where activity was held, it was mainly the small forest beside water.

## 2. Participation – profile of the participants



The activity was targeted to half structured participants. The main group was art students who already had experience of other Erasmus project (totally 10 students). Then there were invited music students, because they would broaden the project to larger scale of senses (voice, hearing). And music students would bring non-visual artist perspective. Total amount of adult music students in the project was six plus one piano student from local junior high school invited four other students to participate the

activity. We also invited 10 Ukrainians to the art project but they couldn't come.

The teachers that were involved with the project was music teacher Anna, Siilinjärvi community college headmaster Anita and art teacher Mari.

In the beginning the idea was to invite also citizens from Siilinjärvi to participate to the art activity.

The channel for the invitation would have been a local newspaper. But it's so insecure channel because we never know how many readers it reaches and how many we would have spontaneously got to the activity. This was bit risky. Either we would have got super many or none, and with the resources that we had; it was better to build the main group on those people that we could count on.

The students ages from adult choir and art classes were from 42 up to 87 years. The junior high school students were (all of them) fifteen years old.

The basic idea of participating to the activity was that it's free of assumptions - capability, disabilities, former experience, language, age etc

Mari made the groups to the art activity, using her organisational power so that equality and diversity stay in groups. But the activity itself was made so that it doesn't put the participants in the roles that was expected. Like art students weren't in the leading role in the activity. Or they suppose not to be. But maybe the experience that they have led them to boost the beginning of the activity.

Of course, there is in a group project always some power structures. Some must take the leader role, so that the actual activity goes on and result is done. But in this way power structure is not such that it diminishes others but rather makes the activity to work. While watching the activity from group to group, it seemed that most of the groups worked equally, doing things together and communicating together with or without the same language. And relationships between participants were equal.



### 3. The art activity – what and why

The main idea of the activity was:

- to do art together in groups that contain one art and one music student plus one foreigner that won't speak the same language (diversity)
- to make art in nature from natural materials (nature, space, sense of touch, sense of seeing)
- art activity includes music, voices, sounds (small concerts in the activity and after activity, sense of hearing) and lunch outside (sense of taste, sense of smell)



→ activity also represents as a whole day activity the Finnish nature culture/bondage ("Finnishness")

All participated to all activity parts: warming up, bonding, art activity, lunch, community singing, exhibition and wrap up in the afternoon. All participants were also invited to the joint dinner, evening concert and public sauna after the day activity.

The art activity started with **general explanation of the activity:**

1. *why we have gathered*
  - a. background of the project
2. *timetable in activity*
  - a. structure of the day (warm up, painting)
  - b. lunch breaks and timetable for that (first painting time was around 1,5 hours, lunch at midday (includes typical Finnish hiking/camping food (sausages, small salad, bread, coffee) and music as performed and sing-a-long (songs: same songs as in the morning plus sing-a-long Kalliolle kukkulalle )
  - c. painting time and exhibition (building and introducing the group work; in the end -> art exhibition was made together in between the trees. So that the big papers looked like that we have hanged bed sheets drying in between the trees)
  - d. evening program with dinner, concert, sauna (volunteer)
3. *who is involved with the activity*
  - a. who is involved: art student/music students/Erasmus guests
  - b. how the groups are formed who make art together

Before the art activity started there were two short Finnish songs (Sinisiä, punaisia ruusun kukkia (Blue, red roses) and Katselin taivaan tähtiä, (Looking the stars in the sky)) to bring the participants to the nature environment and to that moment (which was exceptionally cold in that day 17.5., around plus seven).

Warm up before art activity was a sound improvisation with music students. All participants standing in a circle, back-to-back the inner circle. Listening the nature around us, getting inspired from that and making their own sounds.



Sound of kantele (Finnis zither) was the starting sound that led to the other voices. Own sounds were inspired from the others around us, and the tune of the voices that changed. The point was to sense and hear the others and make bondage with the others.

Then the art activity was explained:

a. *materials:*

- a. **bamboo paper**
  - i. size 1 m x 40 cm
- b. **natural colours**
  - i. from the ground (sand brown)
  - ii. leaves (green)
  - iii. flowers (yellow)
  - iv. hibiscus juice (purple and blue/green)
  - v. coal (Black/grey)
  - vi. aronia juice (purple and red)
- c. **salt and soda** to change the colour
- d. **gum arabic** to bind the colours together
- e. **water**
- f. **brushes**
  - i. nature branches, like sticks, straws, leaves, feathers etc
  - ii. normal ones, watercolour brushes



b. *technique:*

- a. **how to make** natural colours
  - i. grinding with stones the leaves -> green
  - ii. digging and grinding with stones the soil -> brown
  - iii. hibiscus juice was made like tea and aronia juice made by squeezed berries-> blue, red, green, purple colours
- b. **how to mix** colours and how to use different mediums
  - i. colour plus gum arabic -> watercolour
  - ii. blended with water -> different shades
  - iii. if soda or salt was added to the juices, how it changes the colour
- c. **how to paint without brushes**
  - i. pressing the paper -> getting prints from the earth by stepping on the paper or using other pressing materials from the nature
  - ii. colouring hands and painting with fingers
  - iii. painting with sticks and feathers and pure flowers using as brushes etc.



Mari's role in the activity was mainly answer when she was asked but not to interfere with the process. The result wasn't the main thing but rather the process to doing things together, communicating via pictures.

In the beginning the idea was also to make QR code to the exhibition so that the people who passes the exhibition, could find out from our web page about the project. Unfortunately, there came too many other projects over each other's, so that the hanging of the QR codes went too far away from the project and the huge spring winds managed to take the pictures from the trees back to nature (in other words: papers vanished somewhere)



## ***The reflections – how it went and what we learned***

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The activity here hopefully led to lose the boundaries between:

1. different subjects that are taught in classroom
2. known and unknown, either the question is in technique or other people
3. skills and incompetence, learning about the process rather than result
4. strange and familiar, learning communicational skills without mutual language
5. other groups in the municipality and promote the co-operation with local operators like the local theatre.

This activity showed for example that:

- A. this could be easily transformed e.g., to a marketing event where our students meet people to whom they show what we do in our school - like peer mentoring to the art.
- B. this same activity could be done for example with refugees or in the event for homeless people etc. No high expectations of quality art but doing some art together so that each participant is equal between each other. The materials should be such that also those who might be more experienced will be at the same level with other participants.



Examples of further activities that are based on this activity:

1. All make own brushes from the materials that could be found at home or outside (yarn, feathers, fabric etc) and paint pictures with food colours
2. Try to find printing materials from home (toilet paper roll, pen heads, bottles, fruits etc.) and print with finger colours on a gift-wrapping paper
3. Fingerpaints from natural materials (e.g. quark and aronia, potato starch and hibiscus) and paint with fingers on large paper on the wall of your feelings

The point wasn't to do the scenery painting but rather doing painting in the nature and with the help of the nature. Using colours from the nature, sensing the environment, communicating with pictures, doing together and studying about yourself doing together with strangers and in the process making art piece.

In a nutshell it went as it was planned. The activity and it's content has been almost the same ever since from the beginning of the Erasmus project. Some progress has happened and some changes too.

Past winter season (2021) showed that there are many natural possibilities for making the activity. In Siiinjärvi community college art lessons were made some juice paintings with good results and also nice eco prints with garden plants. These experiments led to the choice that was used in the activity: natural colours straight from the nature, plus possibility to try to make marks to the paper without normal pencils and brushes.



This activity was also a small way back to the inner child. There is creativity what we lose easily in this technological society. Making art hasn't actually changed so much from the ancient times when people made marks on cave's walls to show other people what they have achieved in their hunting trips. It needed only the rock and the piece of red ochre and no art education. That's many times forgotten in the world that is filled with possibilities.

